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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/08/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BL](#)
SUBJECT: FORMER PRESIDENT SEES DEMOCRACY AS MAJOR CHALLENGE
FACING BOLIVIA

REF: 06LA PAZ 3258

Classified By: Amb. Philip S. Goldberg for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) The Ambassador met February 6 with former president Jaime Paz Zamora, his son, Congressman Rodrigo Paz Pereyra, and Zamora's longtime advisor, Oscar Eid Franco. Paz Zamora described Evo Morales' presidency as a "phase in Bolivian democracy." While the former president said it is important to prepare for what comes after Morales, he spent much of his conversation with the Ambassador reviewing recent Bolivian history. Although concerned about Morales' commitment to democracy, Paz Zamora provided a balanced take on the current situation, and was particularly pleased with the evolution of Bolivian political parties. Nonetheless, Paz Zamora lamented the opposition's failure to work together, despite the erosion of middle class support for the GOB, and made it clear that in his opinion, the next president of Bolivia would come from the left, not the "extreme right," as he characterized leading opposition party PODEMOS. End Summary.

MORALES A PHASE IN BOLIVIAN HISTORY

12. (C) The Ambassador met February 6 with former president Jaime Paz Zamora, his son, Congressman Rodrigo Paz Pereyra, and Paz Zamora's longtime advisor Oscar Eid Franco. Paz Zamora started the conversation by saying that he was not especially concerned about the Morales government, calling it another "phase in Bolivian democracy, just like Sanchez de Lozada was a phase." Reviewing recent Bolivian history, Paz Zamora said he believes Morales has made many missteps and argued that Morales has been behaving cautiously since the December 2006 Santa Cruz general strike (Reftel). Paz Zamora argued that it is important to prepare for what will come after the Morales government but complained that "Bolivians do not think about the long term, which causes the country to

go from extreme to extreme."

OUR INSTITUTIONS HAVE IMPROVED BUT ARE THREATENED

13. (C) A case in point, for Paz Zamora, was the near-failure of the democratic opposition to unite in the senate to propose a common candidate for the presidency of the senate. Opposition personality conflicts, argued Paz Zamora, brought the opposition within a hair's breadth of ceding control of the senate to Morales' MAS party. Nonetheless, (and somewhat contradictorily) Paz Zamora argued that for the first time in Bolivia's history, political parties are no longer "factions in search of an army" but mature parties in the Western sense, representing distinct ideological trends and political platforms. The biggest challenge is that the opposition does not work together, as "they are too busy looking out for their own interests and fail to see the big picture of democracy."

14. (C) The ex-president told the Ambassador that it is important to reinforce independent institutions such as the court system, and suggested that Morale's association with Chavez is hurting him with the middle class, whose support is key for any government. Congressman Rodrigo Paz noted that Chavez' self-identification with the state was fueling Bolivians' fears that Morales might just want to stay on forever. This was particularly troublesome for many voters who had voted for Morales to give him a chance at government, allow him to fail, and move on to a more moderate solution.

BLOW YOUR OWN HORN

15. (C) Paz Zamora congratulated the Ambassador on the United States' prudent position in the face of Morales' constant attacks and advised him to have thick skin, as Morales "cannot afford to let the image of the United States equal progress in Bolivia." Repeatedly returning the theme, Paz Zamora suggested the USG needs to do a better job in publicizing its aid work in the country. Freely admitting that the GOB was singularly unhelpful in this regard, he nonetheless argued that historically, U.S. self-promotion of its good works has been inadequate in Bolivia, and has led to the population at large profoundly underestimating the extent of U.S. assistance.

COMMENT

16. (C) Leftist Paz Zamora, although aging and semi-retired in Tarija, is an influential person in Bolivian politics and a keen and committed observer of the Bolivian political scene. His balanced take on current events was interesting, given the views of many other opposition interlocutors. Unlike other opposition members, he seems to be taking Evo Morales' presidency in stride, even though he (with other ex-presidents) is facing GOB judicial harassment. End Comment.
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